

National Heritage Team of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Oral History Program
Subject/USFW Retiree: Harry Pinkham (*passed away 10/23/09*)
No. 3101702

Date:

Interviewed by: Dorothe Norton

Dorothe Norton:

Good afternoon Harry, it's really good to see you. So first thing I want to know is how old you are and where you were born.

Harry Pinkham:

Well, I was born in Windsor, Maine in 1920.

Dorothe Norton:

What date?

Harry Pinkham:

March 25th.

Dorothe Norton:

Okay, so you were just 82?

Harry Pinkham:

Yes. And that was the same year that women and Negroes got the right the right to vote.

Dorothe Norton:

Oh! Well, I guess that's good. And your parent's names were? Your dad was Harry P.?

Harry Pinkham:

No, Harry W. He was in law enforcement.

Dorothe Norton:

In Maine?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, actually yes, but he went all over. He was appointed by Eisenhower as a Marshall, U.S. Marshall for the state of Maine, which means they do that, one for each state. And what they do is transport prisoners, they do that a lot now but they didn't very much 10 years ago. But that's what he did, that's what he ended up doing. But he was in law enforcement all of his life.

Dorothe Norton:

And how about your mom, what was her name?

Harry Pinkham:
Gertrude **Arneli**

Dorothe Norton:
And did she work at all?

Harry Pinkham:
No, she never worked, she had 6 children.

Dorothe Norton:
So she was plenty busy, she didn't have to work outside the home.

Harry Pinkham:
That's right. And that was during the Depression, there weren't very many people that could find extra work. That was our growing up period, right during the Depression days.

Dorothe Norton:
So did you spend all of your early year's right there in Windsor?

Harry Pinkham:
Yes I did, until I graduated from high school. And then I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do, I went into the Marine Corps and then after the war I got out. Then I hung around for awhile. Well, Millie was in the Marine Corps to.

Dorothe Norton:
Was she really?

Harry Pinkham:
Yes, and when we were discharged we came back to Maine (she was from Wisconsin). Well, then I was getting ready to figure out what do with my life, and I had three opportunities that showed up; I could have kept my old rank in the Marine Corps if I reenlisted, and then I had thought about going to an undertakers schools, and then I thought about going to the Maine Conservation people, the State Fish and Game Department. And I went right to there because that was my first choice, and that's where I started issuing these uniforms things.

Dorothe Norton:
So you did not go to college?

Harry Pinkham:
No, I never did. I've had to answer that question many times, but no I didn't.

Dorothe Norton:

When I started most of the agents had not gone to college, but they were really good agents.

Harry Pinkham:

(Well, it was good thing I quit). But Christ it took another 15 years to educate me! No kidding! All the time in Marine Corps they'd send me to one school, when I'd come back they'd send me to another school. That's what I did the whole time in the Marine Corps when I was stationed in California in the Mohave Desert, but Millie was too for that matter.

Dorothe Norton:

So did you know Millie before you met her in the Marine Corps or how and when did you meet her?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, we were at the same base out there; she used to come over the mess shop. I put a sign up telling them that I didn't like to have these women come over here making coffee and disturbing my working men!

Dorothe Norton:

And was she also from Windsor?

Harry Pinkham:

No, she's from Wisconsin.

Dorothe Norton:

Oh, she's from Wisconsin! When and where did you get married?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, we got married in Bakersfield, California. We hitchhiked up to Bakersfield one weekend on a pass on the backend of a flatbed truck!

Dorothe Norton:

While you were still in the service?

Harry Pinkham:

Yes, over the Tehachapi Mountains right into Bakersfield, a beautiful town. We got married. The preacher, well a preacher, I don't know what he was... We got this hotel room, and we told him we were going to get married and he said, "Wow!" I said, "Where could we find a preacher?" And he said, "Who would you like marry to marry you?" He was probably a justice of the peace, I don't know, I never saw him again, but we got married there in the hotel.

Dorothe Norton:
What year did you get married?

Harry Pinkham:
Well, it must have been in '40's, in '43 I guess.

Dorothe Norton:
And how many children do you have?

Harry Pinkham:
We have 4.

Dorothe Norton:
And what are their names and what are they doing now?

Harry Pinkham:
Well, Jim is an electronics specialist. He's in Dover, New Hampshire. And I hold my breath every day when the newspaper comes out to see if he's got a job the next day or not. They've been firing like mad, it's all over the country; electronics people are hitting the dirt. But he's still working, he's well thought of in the company.

Dorothe Norton:
That's good. He's the oldest?

Harry Pinkham:
No, he's the youngest.

Dorothe Norton:
And who are the other 3?

Harry Pinkham:
The next one is Stephanie, and we call her Steve because she was supposed to be a boy! She was our third girl, and she was born in Alaska. She was real active, drum majorette, loved the band up there and all of that stuff. She enjoyed her high school very much. And Melodie is the next oldest. And she and Steve both loved high school; they had good schooling there in Minnesota. And they went right from there right into business training, so they both turned out to be RN's. And boy, you should see what they, those RN's, what they get paid for now. Oh gosh, they can't hire them because they can't find them anymore, students or anything like that. Gosh, you can name your own price.

Dorothe Norton:
Well that's good. But they came from two pretty smart parents, that's how they got so smart themselves because you and Millie must have willed that to them!

Harry Pinkham:
Well, we didn't will it to them; we willed everything else to them!

Dorothe Norton:

You can tell them we're smart but you can be smart too.

So whatever made you first think you wanted to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, I went to work for the state first. That was Fish and Wildlife we called it, but that was State Fish and Game Department. Actually, after the war I decided to go to college. And so I went up to the University of Maine and I thought I would like to be a forester, I liked forestry and I liked wildlife and stuff, I liked being out in it in the woods. But I stood in this long line of people registering for college, and I'm about five people from the end of the register and I decided, oh this is too much! We just turned around and walked out. So I never went back to forestry. But I got started thinking that way and so I went right to the Fish and Game in Maine. And I worked for them for 3 years I think; they were awful nice to me.

And then when I left, I resigned from there, I went and joined the jet fighter squadron in Augusta. They were just starting that up there then. So they let me in on that. And I enjoyed that, it was right near where I worked in Augusta at the airport, the headquarters. So when I decided to make this big move I talked to my boss in the Fish and Game and he said, "Yeah, like I'll accept your resignation!" He said, "I just want to give you a year's leave of absence." And he said, "I always wanted to go to Alaska myself."

And so I got out of the National Guard, that jet squadron, and got out of the Fish and Game in Maine, and bought a truck and got the 2 kids that I had then and my wife and away I went up the highway. That new highway they built because they thought the Japanese were on there way. And the highway was nowhere near done, and we crossed on ferries and on ice and everything. It worked fine until we got near a creek and I looked over the other side of this big river, it was the Smoky River I think, and there was a bulldozer with a long chain down in the water and he was pulling something out of the water. I was on the Maine side of the river, I got there early enough, and I said, "What the heck are they doing?" And he said, "Oh, that's the last car that was crossing." He went through the ice, and they were pulling him the rest of the way. I guess they got the people out first probably. So that's what the road was like then.

Dorothe Norton:

So you were going to Alaska then to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Harry Pinkham:

Yes.

Dorothe Norton:

So that was your first job with the Fish and Wildlife was in Alaska?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, not really, they weren't ready for me. It takes awhile to get in with the federal you know. So I went to work for the Army on the big expansion going on. The Japanese were coming and everybody was excited, and they were getting excited again about Russia, and they were getting more excited about North Korea. Oh yeah, we built 2 air bases right there while I was there right in Anchorage. I helped them get started on that, and then I went to work for the Fish and Game.

I probably was one of the few people, and Douglas was another one, who went to work for Alaska Game Commission. You probably never heard of that. But that was composed of old hunters, old people, they were all old. Gosh, they were all in their 75 and 80's. And they knew something about the old ways that the people liked to live, and that's why they probably appointed them, but they were appointments. Gruening, who was a Representative to Congress for Alaska, he appointed them I think. That was what my first badge that's what it said on it, "Alaska Game Warden," something like that. But that was recalled and then we were made Game Enforcement Agent.

Dorothe Norton:

Was it Fish and Wildlife Game Management Agent?

Harry Pinkham:

Yes, a Game Management Agent. Then I carried that badge ever since, or until I retired, when I retired in Minnesota.

Dorothe Norton:

So after Alaska you came to Minnesota then?

Harry Pinkham:

Yes. Well statehood came along you see. And they didn't have a Fish and Game Department or such, it was just a territory. And that's what it was when I went there. Half of the time I was there it was still a territory and it just finally got statehood. That's another thing that happened. Well I stayed on for about 3 years; I was in charge of Fairbanks at that point. That was after Clarence had got lost on (**unclear**) Mountain, or we lost him. His son and the guy in charge of Fairbanks at the time, they were lost for some time, many years. They finally found them in the Brooks Range right near the Arctic Ocean. Doug got good information on that. And he was a well-loved guy.

Dorothe Norton:

So, then you came to Minnesota and Doug Swansson was your supervisor --- no, Bill **Urbrock**.

Harry Pinkham:

Well, they were both supervisors.

Dorothe Norton:

You know why I said that Harry, he was my first supervisor.

Harry Pinkham:

Oh Bill was?

Dorothe Norton:

Yes. Oh dear, he only lived about 3 blocks from mother's home, so I became very good friends with his wife Bernice, she was just a sweetheart.

Harry Pinkham:

I never knew her, he never brought her around.

Dorothe Norton:

No, she was very, very nice. And she's passed away too, Bill died many years ago.

Harry Pinkham:

Yeah, I remember when he died.

Dorothe Norton:

He was so thin, and he smoked.

Harry Pinkham:

Oh Christ, he had a lot of things wrong with him, I don't know what.

Dorothe Norton:

Our favorite name for him was the "Federal Sparrow," but we never called him that to his face, Edie and I.

Well, did you like the pay and benefits when you came to work for the federal government?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, it wasn't very much then. They've increased it a lot since then. Well yes, I should say that referring to that was that one of the reasons I left, probably the main reason I left Maine was they wouldn't pay anything up there. Maine was the lowest, they didn't pay anything. Christ, I think I was getting \$40.00 a week and a 30 year retirement program.

Dorothe Norton:

To take care of a wife and children, huh?

Harry Pinkham:

Yes, but that's when jobs weren't available, it was pretty hard to come by. That's why the guy that I kind of liked, the head of the Fish and Game in Maine said, "I'll give you a year's leave of absence." But he didn't say what his thinking was. I knew what it was afterwards. What they were going through was a situation where they were reevaluating

everything. The pay came up pretty fast. So they started paying the guys what they should have been paying them. But I'm glad I didn't stay for that.

Dorothe Norton:

When did you retire Harry? Do you remember what the date was?

Harry Pinkham:

No, not really.

Dorothe Norton:

What year? Probably in '75, because you had to be 55, didn't you have to retire at age 55 back then?

Harry Pinkham:

I don't know when I had to retire, I didn't go by that. Whenever I could retire!

Dorothe Norton:

Howard Brown said he retired when he was 55.

Harry Pinkham:

Who did?

Dorothe Norton:

Howard Brown, the man that was just here with me.

Harry Pinkham:

Oh really. Well, I didn't go by that. I don't know, I can't remember really.

Dorothe Norton:

That's alright.

Harry Pinkham:

Well, I've got plenty of papers up there, one of them would tell me.

Dorothe Norton:

That's okay. Do you feel that you received lots of training to do the job with the Fish and Wildlife?

Harry Pinkham:

Oh, that's all they ever did to me was to try to make me smart! I guess they never completed the job. Christ, I was going to school on up to... What the hell, I went to that school down in... ?

Dorothe Norton:

Georgia? Down to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center?

Harry Pinkham:

Yeah, yeah, I forget what they called the school. It's where they trained their federal officers. And most of them were young college kids. And they stuck me in a great big class full of those people. My gosh, I couldn't believe it, I was probably the oldest man there, no there was one other guy that was about my age, he worked for the IRS.

Dorothe Norton:

Well their still using FLETC today except we have our Training Center down in Shepherdstown too for some things, it's beautiful down there too.

Harry Pinkham:

Well, this was a terrific thing, the Secret Service and all of the federal...

Dorothe Norton:

Except FBI.

Harry Pinkham:

Except FBI, they did their own program, so that's what it was. Jeeze, that was tough, that was a tough course.

Dorothe Norton:

Yes, but it's brought us some wonderful agents.

Harry Pinkham:

Well, I did quite a lot, I studied like hell, I had to, I'm a slow learner. A lot of people pick things up just like. And me, I've got to sit there and mull about it for a month and come up with an answer of some kind.

Dorothe Norton:

Were you ever involved in any special projects?

Harry Pinkham:

Yes, I should say so. I was involved in the Mongoose Project. That was a strange one. People would come into Duluth, boats from Europe and they would bring pets, these sailors when they came in. So one day the newspaper said, "We had a mongoose to put in the zoo here." Well, mongoose are prohibited you know. They ruined the Hawaiian Islands, the mongoose did. They're like rats. And they killed every bird that couldn't fly, young birds you know, and they wiped out an entire species almost. So that why we went to the zoo, we had a hell of a time. And a fellow named Udall ran the show then in Washington. I was seizing the thing and the newspapers were wondering what the hell I was doing taking that animal away from that nice zoo. Well wouldn't you know, we got another president or somebody got with him and he gave them permission to keep it, which is not an unusual thing to do.

Dorothe Norton:

Were there any major issues you ever had to deal with?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, yes. There was a problem period of what they called the "Great Duck Shoot" up there in Point Barrow with the Eskimos. Well, at the time the we were having trouble, we weren't but Kennedy was, was having trouble with the Negroes in Alabama because they wanted to be in the integrated schools, they wanted to be with the white kids. And they were having a big fuss about that, and they were having riots and they were having marches and this and that. Nobody got killed I guess, but they had an awful lot of publicly going on. About the same time I got involved with these Eskimos in Point Barrow, which is the furthest point north in the United States, it's at the tip tippe top up at the Arctic Ocean. Traditionally, all of their lives they had killed these King Eider, which would come up the shoreline during migration periods, and they would kill them. Just a tradition, but I don't know how many they'd eat. When I went up to investigate it was pretty hot spot. Christ, they had big 50-gallon drums for collection like garbage, that's how they took care of their garbage up there, just full of ducks overflowing over the top, dead, rotten. So it wasn't a serious eating problem. But nobody else in the Fish and Wildlife Service, when I say nobody else I mean I'm talking about the supervisors, they always wanted to do it but they never did, so they picked me and sent me up there. And that's the end of the world.

Dorothe Norton:

You probably did a good job up there though Harry.

Harry Pinkham:

Well, I thought I did. I picked up 150 or so of them, illegal --- what they were doing they were violating a treaty which was made by Great Britain and Mexico and the United States having to do with migratory waterfowl.

Dorothe Norton:

Who were your supervisors when you were in Alaska?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, the guy I came in contact the most with was Dan Ralston and Doug Swansson. And then of course Clarence Rhode was the "top gun."

... I picked up all of these Eskimos, it was getting kind of ugly, and they didn't have enforcement up there at all, it was just do what you want to. I mean their right up there in the Arctic Ocean. So they threw me in there, and it was 150 of them and I got them all set up for court and that's as far as it went.

You had the Negroes down in the south and the Eskimos up in the north I think Washington, D.C., including Kennedy, didn't want anymore hotshots.

Dorothe Norton:

So do you remember who was president when you were working or secretary of interior, or the directors of the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Harry Pinkham:

Oh yes, most of them, but I don't know in what order. I remember Udall. And presidents I knew. Christ, they were pretty knowledgeable.

Dorothe Norton:

I can't even remember who the presidents were when I was serving.

Harry Pinkham:

No kidding?

Dorothe Norton:

Well, I can remember the ones now but when I started way back when, you know.

Harry Pinkham:

Well, Kennedy, I remember him because he was my bug, he really got me. That's the reason I had to drop the case just like that, dropped it. It was a political move.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you think that changes in administrations affected our work in Fish and Wildlife Service, like democrats were in or republicans?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, I can't see that it has very much, if any. But maybe I'm not that knowledgeable about what goes on in the higher echelon!

Dorothe Norton:

When you're in law enforcement you're in law enforcement.

Harry Pinkham:

Yeah, you generally don't get your nose much out from under the rug.

Dorothe Norton:

What do you consider the high point in your career? Or did you ever have one?

Harry Pinkham:

Oh, I had a lot of high points. Escaping a few crashes in the damned airplane were the most memorable ones! I don't know anything but I can think of all kinds of things that I've written about.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you ever consider you had a low point in your career?

Harry Pinkham:
No, I never did.

Dorothe Norton:
That's great.

Harry Pinkham:
And as old as I am, I look back and every day is nothing but good.

Dorothe Norton:
Did you ever have a dangerous or frightening experience when you were working in your law enforcement?

Harry Pinkham:
Quite a few!

Dorothe Norton:
Quite a few, huh? How about humorous, did you ever have any humorous ones?

Harry Pinkham:
Yes I did.

Dorothe Norton:
What was the most humorous you would remember?

Harry Pinkham:
Well, remember I mentioned that mongoose thing?

Dorothe Norton:
Yes.

Harry Pinkham:
The mongoose is built something like a big rat, only bigger and heavier and uglier. Well, they had all of this publicity going on, seizing this damned mongoose from the zoo, which was a local thing there in Duluth. And everybody was up in arms about it and they didn't like me worth a darned, but nothing I could do about it. Udall took care of that, he just gave it to them. But the funny part of that was halfway to Duluth, which is quite a little ways down there from Minneapolis, I mean halfway to Minneapolis in a little town, Aitkin, Minnesota. And somebody called me on the phone and said, "There's somebody that's got a mongoose down in Aitkin and he's showing it to people." Oh God, I leaped in my old buggy and away we went. We got down there and I got the guy's name. I got into Aitkin and I went over to the post office because they know a lot of names, and I said, "Do you know this fellow?" And he said "Oh yes." I said, "Well, I'm the Fish and Wildlife guy here from northern Minnesota and I hear that there's somebody around town that's got some mongoose that they're displaying." "Yeah" he says, "the name is mine." I

said, "Do you mean you've been displaying the mongoose?" And he started laughing, and he said, "Oh no, it's nothing like that," and then he told me the story. His wife had a group of women that she entertained now and then, probably a book club or some sort of a club that they met. Well, he made a little box and it was big enough to hold this furry animal. So he told these women, it was a group of them, that he had this mongoose and he was going to show it to them. But he said, "Be careful, some of this box is kind of weak." And so he kept the box, and the women were all standing around and he opened up this box, the front of the box and "whoosh," something went out of there like mad. And that was supposedly the mongoose. It wasn't anything but a bunch of fur, a fur scarf or something, I forget what it was. That was the funniest, and it made the newspapers, the local newspapers.

Dorothe Norton:

Well, Harry this is about all of the questions I have here for you because we just kind of like to know things that you did while you were in your career that were important to you and what you knew and what you could have learned, that type of thing. What do you think the future is for the Fish and Wildlife Service in the next decade or so?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, I think conservation is going to become more prevalent in our society and people are going to be more conscious of it, which means there are more restrictive laws and especially the importation of animals which are prohibited. We went through some of that with (**unclear**). We went through an awful lot of bird feather stuff that would come off of big boatload shipments of stuff. It was soaking in formaldehyde or something like that and then dried them out. People were using them for waterfowl feathers, for duck feathers.

But yeah, I think an international movement for game is going to be a big thing, it was getting that way when I left. We established a place in New York and Florida and Seattle and probably California too, where the imports came in. So that was getting to be pretty big then, and that was when I retired.

Dorothe Norton:

Well, we hope that we'll still be alive and people will be aware of what we're trying to do to protect everything.

Harry Pinkham:

Yeah, well they won't be unless somebody tells them. I mean it has to be a television program or something.

Dorothe Norton:

Well Harry, I'm sure happy that I was able to find you and that you're "Up and Adam" and your mind is still sharp as a tack. And I'm happy that you allowed me to do this little interview. Would you like to have a copy of this when they type it up?

Harry Pinkham:

I would just so that I know what is says.

Dorothe Norton:

We'll send it to you then. But thank you so much, and I'm just really happy that I got to see you again.

Harry Pinkham:

Well, I've been awfully pleased to know that you've been around.

Dorothe Norton:

Who else do you think we should interview, anybody special? I mean do you think of people that you would like to read about them if you ever were down at the Center or know about what they think?

Harry Pinkham:

Well, one of the big stories I think in the Fish and Wildlife Service was with the loss of Clarence Rhodes and his group when they flew into the Brooks Range up there. God, they weren't found for awhile, how many years I don't remember at all.

Dorothe Norton:

Well, we're going to just try and do as many as we can and hopefully it's going to pay off because this way when people go down to the Center they'll be able to ask if anybody knows anything about say Harry Pinkham or Dorothe Norton or whatever. And if we've been interviewed they'll be able to look us up, and if we've been interviewed they can read about us. And I know people will remember. I know I've heard people mentioning you and I never knew you'd even been in Alaska. So see, people remember a lot of things.

Harry Pinkham:

Oh yes. Well Christ, most people don't know that the Game Commission was the one that was regulating the game in Alaska when I joined the Service.

Dorothe Norton:

Well thank you Harry so much for your time.

Harry Pinkham:

Well, thank you.

UNVERIFIED: Gertrude **Arneli** (pg 1); Bill **Urbrock** (pg 6);

KEY WORDS: Harry Pinkham; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Game Commission, Alaska Governor Ernest Henry Gruening, Alaska Game Warden, Game

Management Agent, Fairbanks, Clarence Rhode, Brooks Range, Doug Swansson, Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC), National Conservation Training Center, Shepherdstown, West Virginia, Mongoose Project (Mr. Magoo the mongoose, 1962), Great Duck Shoot, Point Barrow, Eskimo, King Eider duck, Dan Ralston, Stewart L. Udall,